...we were told to stay away, and far away, by Kennedy, personally...

Did RFK's Order Seal His Death?

By AL STUMP
Herald-Examiner Staff Writer

EXCLUSIVE

Los Angeles Herald-Examiner, Sun., Aug. 29, 1976

In an angry outburst eight hours before his 1968 assassination, Robert F. Kennedy ordered Los Angeles Police Department bodyguards to stop protecting him and barred them from his presence — thereby possibly sealing his death warrant, according to sources here.

Former Police Department security specialist Marion D. Hoover revealed to The Herald-Examiner that Senator Kennedy lashed out at a Parker Center detail assigned to him, saying, "Get the hell away from me and stay away!"

The order was obeyed with great reluctance by the dozen men named to guard the presidential aspirant during his Los Angeles campaign visit.

"At 4:30 p.m. of June 4, our Intelligence group was forced to withdraw all of our protection," disclosed Hoover, who headed the "hot-squad" unit.

"Kennedy irately demanded that we pull out.

"The senator insisted, even though earlier in the day he'd been swarmed over, knocked down and almost trampled by downtown crowds."

Hours later — when Bobby Kennedy was fatally shot at the Ambassador Hotel — the Los Angeles police force did not have one officer stationed inside the building.

"The truth is that we had nobody there for only one reason — we were told to stay away, and far away, by Kennedy, personally," Hoover now reports.

Routine procedure for LAPD Intelligence would have been to check out the hotel's pantry before the V.I.P. and his party entered it and to positively identify everyone there, pointed out Hoover.

"We also would have had three trained men on either side of him and one out front. And, although some of us might have been shot, we could have made all the difference in the world," added the retired officer, who won 27 citations and two Medals of Valor in his 25-year police career.

Early in the morning of June 5, 25-year-old Sirhan Sirhan, an intruder in the pantry, fired fatal bullets into the brother of assassinated President John Kennedy.

Present-day LAPD chief Edward Davis commented Saturday, "We lost the biggest one of them all here because we were not wanted."

The detailed account supplied by ex-Sgt. Hoover is the first inside report on what evidently was a case of open hostility by Kennedy and his staff toward the LAPD and a determined attempt by police despite this to guard him against a situation which grew more dangerous through a frantic day.

Chief of police at the time, Thomas Reddin, confirmed the Hoover story, adding:

"Robert Kennedy very definitely wanted no part of us from the beginning of the trip, despite implicit hazards.

"He even tried to prevent us from supervising his motorcade through central streets on the morning of his death.

"And he blocked us out of the Ambassador, where we were allowed only outside plainclothes and traffic details.

"Had we been able to control security from the start, certainly the attack on him quite possibly could have been averted."

Street scenes which continued to leave local lawmen with feelings of deep regret began building toward a tragedy at midmorning. Deplaning at International Airport, the senator was warned by Hoover to "get ready for a rough day." Racial tension had built locally after firings of some East Los Angeles Mexican-American teachers, who were supported by Senator Kennedy.

"At the outset, at the airport," says Commander Peter Hagan of the LAPD, "a bunch of non-official, grey-shirted and very arrogant motorcycle riders appeared to escort Kennedy from LAX to the garment district downtown. We objected.

"We were informed they were Kennedy backers and to keep that in mind. But in the first few miles they raced through one red traffic light after another. We counted 31 violations and planned to send them to the city attorney's office for prosecution.

"However, when Kennedy died, we dropped the matter."

On Spring Street in the garment section, bodyguard Hoover stuck close to Kennedy, but was unable to prevent him from being knocked to the pavement by a milling 3,000 friends and opponents.

Hagan recounts that an LAPD motor sergeant ran up to help Bobby to his feet. "His hand was batted away by Kennedy who told him to get out of there," says Hagan. That was one of first indications that he intended to waste our usefulness and depend upon his small Secret Service contingent, alone."

Other witnesses testify that the garment throng became so unruly that Kennedy's shoes were torn off and taken. An hour later, new shoes were purchased during his brief stop at the Biltmore Hotel.

The Secret Service, traveling in two cars, advised LAPD commanders that they were "walking on eggs" and that they were worried about their man's constant exposure from point to point. One LAPD official says, "We learned that Kennedy wished to appear anti-police, non-establishment and to not need our help because it was the politically smart thing to do at the time."

Moving to the Old Plaza near Olvera Street, Kennedy drew a crowd estimated at from 12,000 to 15,000, which "went wild" when he agreed to pose for snapshots with various individuals. Hoover's detail had buttons torn off their jackets as they struggled to prevent people from overrunning a speaker's podium.

Hoover: "Here Kennedy had several sets of cuff links torn off — he kept replacing them — and there was no way in the world to protect him."

Ethel Kennedy, pregnant, sat in a parked car and expressed fear over what was going on and asked the LAPD to "please get him out — and fast."

When a route was created through the massed crowd, Kennedy climbed onto his white Chrysler convertible with Marion Hoover and other police holding onto his legs.

"A man I recognized as a punk local pickpocket reached up and grabbed Kennedy's watch off his wrist and began to run.

"I tackled him and threw him into the arms of one of our plainsclothesmen," relates Hoover.

"With that, Kennedy blew up.

"He came totally apart and began to scream at me to get away from him and take the other officers with me. He told us, 'Everybody off the car from now on!'

"And the senator shouted at newsmen around us that he'd have no more pictures taken with local police.

"We protested, but he ordered his car started and they took off at speed, leaving us standing there in the Plaza.

"As the car shot away, it grazed a Los Angeles police officer who was running alongside to offer security and knocked him head-over-heels."

With the intelligence detail of 12 left behind, Kennedy's motorcade proceeded to the Greek Theatre in the Los Feliz district. Hoover radioed Parker Center and reported to his superiors that he'd just been "fired" by the former attorney general and eventual winner of the California primary.

"We'd already heard about it," says Chief Ed Davis, "and we told the unit to pull out, if that was the way the senator insisted on having it."

An incident at the Greek Theatre raised police hackles. The unchecked crowd knocked down women and children, claims Commander Hagan, including one infant. "Her grandmother called us to complain we weren't upholding law and order in Los Angeles. We told her with regrets that the Kennedy people wanted no assistance from us."

Meanwhile, at headquarters, Chief Reddin contemplated what steps he could take to shield the senator at the sprawling Ambassador, where he would appear that night.

"Contact with the Kennedy people was made and it was made clear that our presence not only wasn't wanted, but was inimical to what was called his best interest," states the one-time chief.

Thus not one civic sworn officer was among the several thousand packed into the Ambassador to join in an election victory party the night of the assassination.

This was unprecedented in the city's modern history.

"We've set up elaborate protection for Russia's Nikita Khruschev, Queen Wilhelmina of Holland, Harry Truman, Lyndon Johnson, Dwight Eisenhower, John Kennedy and many more, but never were we excluded from anywhere they went," said Ed Davis, adding wryly, "Jack Kennedy was absolutely uncontrollable when he was in Los Angeles, jumping out of cars into the crowd and leaving police in the lurch at 80 m.p.h.

"But at least he didn't tell us to buzz off."

Marion Hoover, bodyguard to two city mayors and remembered as the security cop who refused Khruschev a trip to Disneyland, to the premier's fury, was at home, watching TV, when he learned that Bobby Kennedy had been shot.

And his 11 partners of the Intelligence unit also were off duty when shots rang out.

"I can't tell you what I thought then. I've never told anyone," says Hoover. At 52, he is the model for the 'Bumper Morgan' character in television's "Blue Knight" series.

Parker Center veterans don't bother to conceal their disgust over a presidential candidate entering a strange room "with only a few amateur sport stars and what Secret Service could get through the mob to cover him."

Was Bobby's Order His Death Warrant?

Following the shooting, police here came in for heavy — but temporary — criticism for alleged failure to provide a tight network around their guests.

"That stopped very quickly," states Commander Hagan.

"We notified Washington that he had dozens of witnesses to our rejection right down the line, and would be glad to make full public disclosure of Robert Kennedy's attitude that we stay out of the picture.

"After that we never heard another complaint from Washington or anyone else."

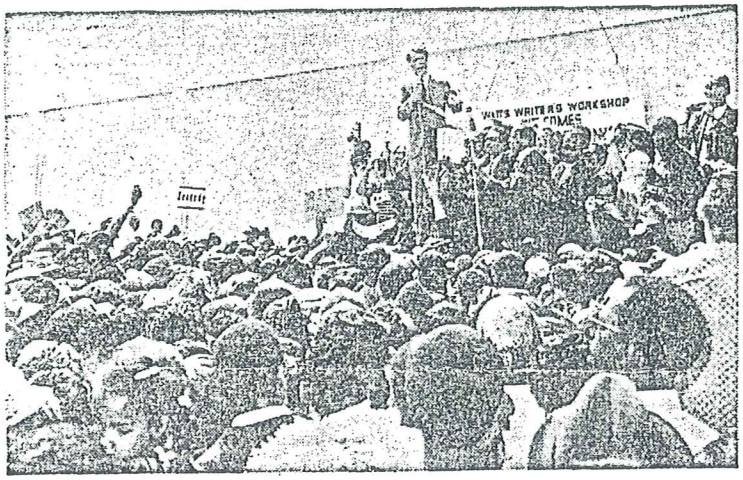
When Washington asked the LAPD to provide escort of Senator Kennedy's body to the airport, for a flight east, this was done.

"And, unbelievable as it sounds, the same grey-shirted, lawbreaking bunch on motorcycles who'd ridden with Kennedy on June 4 showed up to help with the escorting," Hagan said.

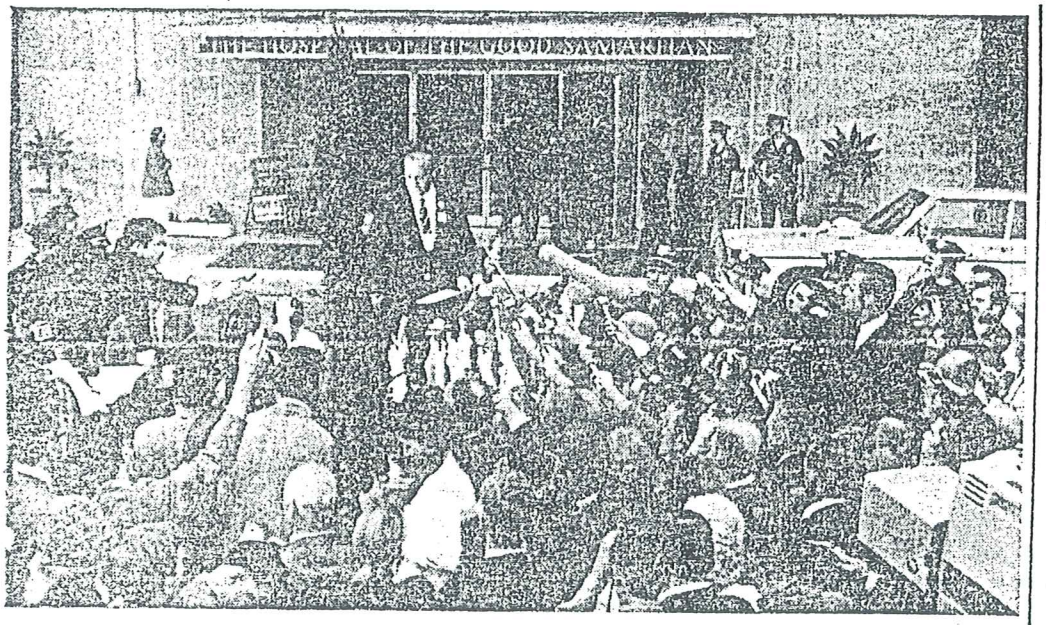
"We had to use some muscle to chase them away."

"We lost the biggest one of them all here because we were not wanted." —Police Chief Ed Davis.

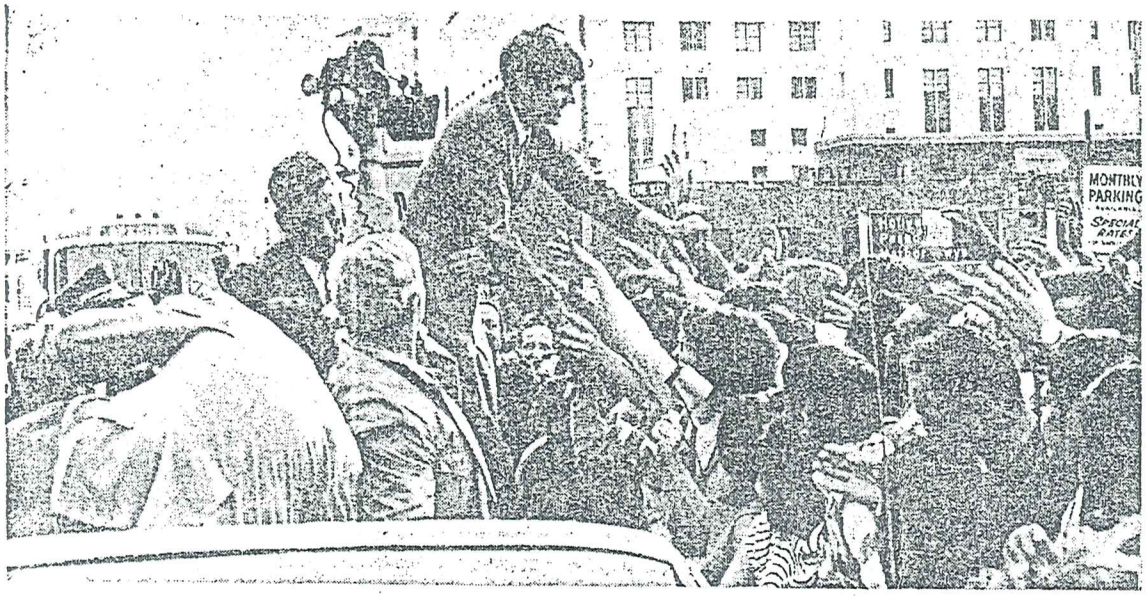
"Robert Kennedy very definitely wanted no part of us from the beginning of the trip." —Thomas Reddin, police chief at the time of the assassination.



At Watts Writer's Workshop, Kennedy addressed members of the black community. Again, the absence of Los Angeles police is notable.



Before he was shot, RFK angrily ordered all protection by Los Angeles police to cease. As Kennedy lay critically wounded in Good Samaritan Hospital, police surrounded his press secretary, Frank Mankiewicz.



Early June 4, 1968, before his outburst demanding removal of L.A. police protection, Robert Kennedy was already surrounded by turbulent crowds. One policeman's cap can be seen at far left. At various points in the tour that day, RFK's shoes, cufflinks, and even his watch were snatched from his possession.

LOS ANGELES EVENING AND SUNDAY

HERALD EXPRESS EXAMINER

SUNDAY, AUGUST 29, 1976

Supporters surround Robert Kennedy, devoid of LAPD protection, just before assassination at Ambassador Hotel.

The kind of "infor-
mation" disclosure
the CAPD doesn't
object to. (Note
Secret Service errors.)